

LABOR IN MOOD TO LET WAGES JOIN DECLINE OF PRICES

Industrial Survey of Two
Cities Finds Only Three
Voluntary Reductions.

RADICALS ARE ACTIVE
Labor Leaders Sneer at Sys-
tems of Industrial Democ-
racy and Shop Plans.

HOW THE WORKERS HELP
Leitch and Bridgeport Plans
in Operation Described by
Participants.

If there is any disposition on the
part of labor to permit wages to join
in the downward trend of prices and
the general effort to beat back any-
thing approximating pre-war values,
it did not manifest itself in a survey
of industrial plants in Greater New
York and in Bridgeport made last week
by *The New York Herald*.

The survey was, of course, limited
to what might be called representative
industries and industrial establish-
ments. For obvious reasons it sought
results in those plants where various
systems of shop representation, em-
ployees' committees, industrial democ-
racy and cooperative societies existed.
The investigation was prompted by the
despatches from Philadelphia a fort-
night ago to the effect that the em-
ployees of the Abram Cox Stove Com-
pany had suggested to their employers
that rather than suffer further re-
duction of their numbers they would
urge a wage reduction of 15 per cent.

Only Three Examples.

The New York Herald was able to
find no establishment where the em-
ployees had, of their own volition, urged
their employers to reduce wages. In
only three cases was it discovered that
the workers, after hearing from their
employers that there were no orders in
sight and that a shutdown seemed in-
evitable, took their cue and drew up
plans of wage reductions, overtime elimi-
nation and so on, warranted to keep the
plant open.

The three illuminating examples of
this were shown in the factories of Wil-
liam Demuth & Co. of Brooklyn, the
Champlain Silk Mills, of Brooklyn, and
Subichall, N. Y., and the Bridgeport
Brass Company of Bridgeport, Conn.
There may be others offering the same
interesting data, but this survey failed
to reveal them.

And further, the reporter found a
score of instances where the employers
had posted notices in which they had
said, in substance, that on such and
such a date such and such shops in the
plant would close and others would be
cut down to the minimum number of
employees necessary to keep the doors
open, and that on that date, the yearly
inventory having been finished, wages
would be cut 10, 15 or 20 per cent.

The Modified Leitch System.
The William Demuth Company, manu-
facturer of tobacco smoking pipes,
cigar and cigarette holders and other
paraphernalia for the tobacco consumer,
closed its factory in Richmond Hill be-
cause of a shortage of orders. The in-
ventory of stock, equipment and the like
might be made. It is the largest in-
dustry of its kind in this country.

"We opened up again on January 1,"
explained Leopold Demuth, president of
the firm, "with 35 per cent. of our
normal force on the payroll. We have
known for some time that industrial de-
mocracy in force in our plant. It is the
Leitch system, modified and adapted.
It has worked well, but no system will
work for itself. No system is stronger
than the organization behind it.

"The point is, however, that I went
before our House of Representatives,
which is composed of elected delegates
from among the actual producers by the
producers, and told them that whereas
more tobacco is consumed when men
are out of work, I did not follow that
idea and bought new pipes.

"I told them that my affairs were
things that I had not been slow to
increase their wages when business
boomed, but that I would not be slow
to increase them again if business in-
creased. But I showed them that we
had no orders; that it is an economic
impossibility to reduce a business on a
losing basis; that if I continued to
run up a weekly deficit I would be
forced to close down the plant, because
I could not meet expenses.

The Workers Propose a Cut.

"Therefore, the House of Representa-
tives drew up a plan. It agreed that
we should reduce the income of the
workers 20 per cent. and that of the day
workers 10 per cent. These decreases
sent the workers back to the old scale
or near it. That appeared to this firm as
a sincere effort on the part of the work-
ers, the producers, to cooperate, and we
accepted their plan. We believe that
business will recover its wonted health
soon. I told the men in our plant that
we would restore the reduction they imposed
upon themselves. Just the moment business
warranted it. We conduct an open
shop. There is no discrimination against
the union man. Any man here can be
just as long as he works honestly, faith-
fully and intelligently. On the other
hand, I am supposed to be an honest,
just and fair to him as he is to me."

At the present time the Bridgeport
Brass Company is operating full time.
Furthermore, only 50 per cent. of its
normal number of workers are working
at that half time. It must be
understood that all the industrial estab-
lishments visited by the reporter for
The New York Herald were operating
at part time and with reduced forces.
Of course it would be infinitely more
interesting to take observations of a
plant where the full force had been re-
duced after the workers had voted them-
selves a decrease in pay. Of course,
again, it would be necessary first to find
that factory.

The Bridgeport Brass Company em-
ployees operate under the so-called
Bridgeport plan, a system less intricate
than the Leitch plan, but like the Leitch
plan of industrial democracy, dependent
on a great degree upon the wisdom, the
leadership and the sincerity of the em-
ployer.

Just before January 1, Guy L. Miller,
general manager for the Bridgeport
Brass Company, went before the council
of the workers in his plant and told
them the same old story. Orders were
not arriving. Old orders had been filled.
There was no new business. Money was
tight. The outlook was not bright. Now
what did the workers propose? The staff

Railroads Cut Wages in Shops and Labor Crews

PADUCAH, Ky., Feb. 1.—Illinois Central Railroad shop employees, it was announced here to-day, have rejected a proposal to cut their work week to five days and were said to be formulating demands for adherence to existing union agreements. Railroad officials said immediate curtailment of the force would result. The shops normally employ 1,500 men.

HORNELL, N. Y., Feb. 1.—Wages of maintenance of way laborers were reduced from 48 cents an hour to 33 and 30 cents to-day by the Erie Railroad Company. The men protested that it was a violation of the national agreement, but remained at work.

YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio, Feb. 1.—Headquarters of the Ohio region of the Erie Railroad here announced to-day a reduction in wages of section hands from 48½ cents an hour to 35 and 38 cents and of unskilled labor from 48½ to 30 cents.

had been reduced. The floaters had been let out. The best men and the old timers had been kept on and the new men had been let out. The company was willing to adopt any suggestion the workers might make, provided, of course, it met the situation.

"The representatives of the workers got together and drew up plans that were so eminently fair that we not only accepted them but thanked the workers. They unanimously agreed that there should be a horizontal wage reduction of ten per cent. to revise all pay prefilled classifications and that they would not accept any reduction in pay from the president of the corporation down to the newest porter who sweeps the floors. They agreed to work overtime or on Sunday they will do it at straight rates, and that no matter how wet or unpleasant a man's work or conditions of work may be he will not be paid a bonus for suffering the physical discomfort incidental to those conditions.

"We are working for our customers and our employees know that. If one of our men has a complaint he can carry it to his representative on the shop committee and be assured that it will be investigated. We have no business interests outside our own business. We want the men to confine their business affiliations to our shops. In brief, we want them to be satisfied with us and ask them to expect us to be square with them. No system of industrial government can succeed on any other basis. No system is more effective than the men back of it. The human element is any system's foundation."

The Bridgeport Radicals Bay.

Of all the numerous industrial plants in Bridgeport the Bridgeport Brass Works appears to have the shop governmental system working smoothest. With the exception of the Lake Torpedo Boat Company and a few others of them have cut wages and all are working on reduced schedules and with diminished staffs—some with but 10 per cent. of their normal force. The huge Singer Sewing Machine Company is running on a three days a week schedule and with a force far below normal. The Salts Textile Company has reduced wages 12½ per cent. Official figures have it that there are between 20,000 and 30,000 men and women out of employment in that city.

The more radical of the labor leaders are working night and day. They emphasize such statistics as Mr. Hoover's—that there is enough food in the warehouses and farms to feed America eighteen months.

"But you can't buy it," they jeer at the idle worker.

And they make much of the American Woolen's wage reduction of 22½ per cent.

The New York Merchants Association has found out that the cost of living has fallen only 12 per cent. and that the cost of food has fallen only 15 and 20 per cent. less pay."

The labor leaders are sneering at shop plans and industrial democracy systems and the like. They point to the great Max Amn plant in Bridgeport and announce that the concrete floors and walls echo with the lonely pinnings of a mere 150 workers—a mere mockery of normalcy.

"America's Great Problem."

"Unemployment is the most serious problem America has to solve," said O. D. Frost, vice-president of the Champlain Silk Mills, Brooklyn, N. Y., must be a new plan. We must keep men and women employed. They have a right to work, and that system that denies them that right is due for a change. "Our employees at Wiltschell voted themselves a 20 per cent. decrease in wages before the plant shut down altogether. Our Brooklyn plant is shut down, too. Only the nucleus of the organization of our industrial democracy system remains—the foremen, assistant foremen, supervisors and clerical force. They have voted themselves a 20 per cent. decrease. But the producers are out of work. We have no orders. There is nothing in sight."

"However, the house of representatives in our two plants held sessions just before the plants closed. The minutes of those sessions are here on my desk, and I'll read them to you, or extracts therefrom."

The minutes contained statements from the actual workers to the effect that they counseled the shutting down of the plant. After that they returned when work resumed; that the firm had dealt squarely with them, and that they marvelled that they had been kept at work so long.

Industrial System on Trial.

But a rather different story is told by Charles Pack, secretary of the Doehler Die Casting Company, Brooklyn. "We installed a shop representation system of our own back in 1919," said Mr. Pack. "It was based upon the usual precepts of industrial democracy. It worked splendidly while the money was at work. After that it became more or less an empty farce, because the men were not here to participate in it. It served to accomplish arbitration when a strike impended. It gave the men a voice in the whole industrial system under which we all operate. If we get new men we shall have to win their confidence as we won that of the old men. As they now? They have scattered and with them went the organization. You can say what you like and theorize as you will, but those men have lost confidence in us. They have lost confidence in the whole industrial system under which we all operate. If we get new men we shall have to win their confidence as we won that of the old men. As they now? 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